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JACK NORRIS--AN EDMONTON PIONEER.

In the elemental days of yore all travel and transport were performed in the mode of primitive man, in moccasins and on snowshoes on land, and propelled by strong arms on water. Horse and dog helped him in carrying burdens or drawing them by travois, sled or cart. He lived, from meal to meal, off the game of the country, obtained by snare, net or gun. And in the estimation of that early community no one who could not take his full part in every one of these activities was counted or entitled to call himself "a man"--the highest title or honor in the wilds.

One who bore that proud distinction amongst the heroes of the Great Lone Land prior to the middle of the last century has just been laid at rest in his last campground. In fewer seconds than in the early days it took months for news to reach Fort Garry from Edmonton House, the wire announced at Winnipeg that Jack Norris, a pioneer of Rupert's Land, had died at his residence on the St. Albert road, near Edmonton, Alta., in the morning of March 15. The press dispatch briefly intimated that his age was 87, and that he came from Scotland in the Hudson's Bay service to Edmonton 67 years ago, and had his domicile there ever since.

THE PRICE OF EMPIRE

Newspapers through the west unite in doing honor to the memory of the old-timers, pioneer farmers and their brave better-halves, as they depart from the scene of their

triumphs over the wilderness on the old prairie homesteads. These leave many proud as well as sorrowing friends behind, as well known and respected members of communities which have become settled and prosperous through the toils and hardships faced and overcome by their pioneer efforts and those of their sorrowing neighbors. However, great were their hardships, and surely they were enough, nevertheless they came not alone of their race into the wilderness, and never had the bitter experience of the lone white man who came as an unwelcome stranger amongst unsympathetic savages, whose good will, sufficient to make the solitude tolerable, could only be gained by lowering a white man's standard and largely adopting the Indian fashion of the country. Such sacrifice was the price of empire held by the Hudson's Bay Company. Thank God we live now in better days.

Moreover, manifold and arduous as were the experiences of the early settlers who came by way of Minnesota overland or down the Red river or by the later Dawson route from Lake Superior, before the age of railway facilities, the pioneers of Rupert's Land, such as Norris, had with strenuous individual toil to work their passage from Hudson's Bay on an entirely unimproved and very difficult route, by processes which this article will attempt to describe.

JOHN NORRIS

John Norris was born near John O'Groat's House, the northern land's end of Britain. After, in early years,

roaming with his gypsy relatives in the north of Scotland, and acquiring their arts and crafts, his family found their way north to Lerwick, in the Shetland Islands. There Jack shipped on whalers and made two voyages to "Greenland's icy mountains" before enlisting in the Hudson's Bay Company's service, for five years at L20 a year, to serve them as a laborer "in North America" and there defend their possessions "with courage and fidelity" Probably the call of the hunting wilderness appealed more to his gypsy blood than adventure on the pathless deep, to which native Shetlanders are wedded.

In August, 1848, Norris landed at York Factory, where there were inland boats belonging to the Saskatchewan District waiting, in which "the recruits from Europe," intended for service in that district and in the New Caledonia and Columbia departments, across the Rocky Mountains, were to work their passage as far as Edmonton that fall. Besides the boats, an experienced steersman and a bowman for each craft were supplied by Saskatchewan. The boats took the annual packages of articles ordered by employees from Britain, and other freight for Saskatchewan and New Caledonia.

TRIALS OF 'PRENTICE HANDS

Old hands and veterans all the world over are too wont to regard with contempt the trials of 'prentice hands. The native boatmen in charge of each end of the craft were no exception to this common failing of mankind, but in their case it was intensified by racial pride and

prejudice most galling to any white man bearing similar sentiments towards foreigners and men of color. While all Indians of that day and generation considered themselves as "the people," they did not assert their inborn sense of superiority over the "Moonyass" (green white man) in the offensive and vain-glorious manner of the Metis.

MAN-KILLING SWEEPS

It was under such "superior officers" that Norris and his mates commenced their career as galley slaves in the Saskatchewan brigade. The inland or "York" boat is admirably modelled for the different services it performs; but the infernal instruments of torture and of least driving force for the greatest muscular exertion euphemistically called "oars" are outrages on common sense and humanity. They are immensely clumsy, heavy "sweeps" not oars, and the unchangeable fashion of handling them native fashion is a parody on rowing, requiring the greatest amount of useless muscular exertion and producing the minimum of propulsion which the perverted ingenuity of man could devise. The effect of this back-breaking circular motion was that the blade entered the water obliquely, instead of perpendicularly, and came out horizontally, with a boil and a sinking pressure on the gunwhale. And this description is necessary to show the stress and strain put on good oarsmen, not accustomed to "rowing" according to the fixed fashion of the country at the time.

The fashion also produced the greatest of all the

great miseries the boatmen underwent, in that the brutal oar soon produced blistered hands. It was considered unmanly to quit for such a trifle, so the blisters broke and the rower went on with raw bleeding palms till inflammation of the whole arm set in, and the galley slave was only exempted honorably from duty when no longer fit to move. To anticipate, only once in all his 15 subsequent voyages between Edmonton and York Factory was Norris so rendered hors de combat.

BLOODTHIRSTY FEMALE OF SPECIES

Although the height of the mosquitoe season, during which the boat route between York Factory and Lake Winnipeg maintained a sanguinary fame second to none in the vast wilderness, where she reigns forever the queen of torments, was on the wane, there still remained swarms, as soon as the chill of night and early morn had passed, to add their venomous stings to the other unwonted hardships which the uninnoculated freshmen from Britain had to endure on the voyage upstream. Much as these obiquitous pests of the wilderness teased the habituated and immunized natives, their sufferings were as nothing compared with the torments and inflammations inflicted on the specially marked victims--the newly arrived Europeans. Years of exposure and suffering on their part has to be undergone ere they acquired anything like the comparative immunity which was the good fortune of the native Indians. From the time the Hudson's Bay men started all over the country on their almost continuous travels throughout the

summer season till the cold weather in autumn, their bloodthirsty midget foes followed them and enveloped them in buzzing swarms. They made hell of a land otherwise a paradise in summer, and made men rejoice when winter blew his first blast and scattered these enemies. Rude Boreas and Arctic cold came as welcome allies against the hated pests of the summer time. After a long, toilsome day on snowshoes, in the open by the smouldering camp fire, the voyageur enjoyed peaceful sleep, uninterrupted by the irritating war song and the poisonous attack of the omnipresent hosts of these enemies. They were the bane and blight of existence of every traveller in the wilds. People, especially those enjoying the almost complete immunity of large towns, and even those where the drainage and cultivation in the country have destroyed the breeding places of the pests, can form no conception of the misery and suffering entailed on man and beast by these pests during the early pioneering stages of the Great Mosquitoe Land.

"TRACKING" UPSTREAM

Now, let us turn from these hated pests to the initiation of Jack Norris as a voyageur. The boats, if the wind was not far enough aft to permit of the use of the single square sails, proceeded under their heavy sweeps till they reached the "tracking ground." Then half the crew landed with a line attached abaft the bow, and harnessing themselves at intervals thereto by their portage straps, commenced to march along the beach, or in the

water inshore if there were none and draw the boat along, while the steersman, occasionally assisted by the bowsman, on board guided her course. The watch off duty immediately wound themselves in their blankets (head and all, to keep off the flies) and coiled down on the cargo for a nap.

On a good beach the men went easily along at a fast walk--much faster than one going "light" usually. Where the beach ended and the water was anything from ankle to waist deep, the trackers merrily plunged in and carried on. Then it often occurred that the water was too deep and they had to tear their way up the bank through brush and forest, which, catching the line often required the last man to unharness himself and clear it. At other places the clay banks were high and steep from deep water, and there the toilers had to plough through soft wet clay, and not only plod ahead but also bend inwards and cling by hand to the yielding clay or chance stone or tuft to prevent themselves from being dragged downhill and plunged into the swirling stream. Even it was occasionally necessary for them to go short distances breast high in the water; but such spots were generally avoided by either rowing past them or crossing the stream to better going on the other side.

In spite of their objection to the abominable oars and their mode of use, already recorded, the recruits were well able to hold their own with the natives in that exercise; but in tracking it was different. The whole thing was a new exercise and European boots an impediment

in it. The men had to wear moccasins of Indian make or clumsy imitations of tanned leather called "beef leather shoes," to which their feet were unaccustomed and in which they got hurt.

PORTAGING

Before reaching the first portage, to be broken to harness with the tump-line, the boats had to be pushed by poles up swift, shallow water, where neither oar nor towline could be used. There was nothing out of the way in this, and the experienced men at the bow and stern directed their efforts. And, after the crews of all the boats doubling up on a whale line to warp each craft separately up a heavy fall, the brigade reached the real testing ground of the green hands on the portages.

Many Canadian rivermen and sportsmen are well up in the mysteries of the portage sling, and how to hang their packs from the broad band across the forehead, Indian fashion, and then jog nimbly along laden at a trot. In the Old Country style, a burden bearer carries by a band round the shoulders and breast and plods along at a walk; so men, and women, too, in the north and fishing places of Scotland, bear great burdens of fish and fuel in creels. But most of these apprentice voyageurs literally "got it in the neck" before they mastered the knack of portaging according to the custom of the country. A giant Orkney-man, new to the work, and of double the strength of a skinny little native, might be seen plodding, with the

gait of a clodhopper over a portage path, under two heavy pieces slung on his back by a strap round the shoulders; while a little native, equally laden, would be lightly tripping past him at a jog trot. While one of the obstinate kind of Scotch-Orkneyman would refuse to learn this foreign way of carrying, the adaptable kind of Scot from the Highlands, or Norsemen from the Shetlands, would be eager to acquire the new and seemingly easy art practiced by the natives. And Jack Norris, if anything, was adaptable, besides being as strong, active and athletic as the best, and with a quick native intelligence, unspoilt by the schoolroom which teaches children to see through the "eyes of others instead us using their own. So by the time the boats had made the 400 mile voyage upstream and over portages to Norway House, he had the honor of being recommended by the native guide to the commander there as one of the few green hands who, on their first voyage, wrung from those severe critics, the native boatmen, the highest praise they could express in the words--"He is a good man, just like a halfbreed, not like a Moonyass at all."

PRESTIGE UPHELD BY FIST

The compliment was, however, not entirely intended to give Jack his due only; but perhaps also by way of apology for a couple of black eyes which adorned the visage of one of the biggest bowsman, who was by habit and repute one of the noted bullies of the Saskatchewan brigade, who had tried to impose on Jack, and met more than his match in

the young Moonyass. Jack was a genial fellow, not at all aggressive, but, though only a medium-sized man, he never would stand bullying or insult from the biggest bully on the plains, until finally, after many a rough and tumble fight and wrestling match with native opponents, he established a reputation which later saved him further trouble in that line.

In describing this phase of a newcomer's experiences in the old territories of the company, it is well worthy of remark that, apart from any superstitious fear which the old-time natives entertained of the "medicine" and arts of the white man, they did not generally make reprisals as a community on the company's men for a thrashing administered with the naked fist, to which these latter were strictly limited by the policy and custom of the service. The employees, except in cases of dire necessity for self-protection, were absolutely forbidden to resort to other weapons, in the use of which the natives, though inferior in boxing, were at least as expert as themselves; and the consequence of which would have aroused a whole tribe to declare war. For the purpose of administering corporal punishment when needed in the case of individual Indians offending, as well as contumacious employees, a bourgeois often had a special constable, called a "bullyar" in his fort or brigade, in the absence of whom either the interpreter or others of the staff, or sometimes the boss himself, performed the duty of maintaining the prestige of the whites with the primitive fist, or other blunt handy

weapon. The company had no use for "gun-men."

BLACKFEET AND BUFFALO BAR RIVER

After passing the portage over the Grand Rapids and other rapids near Lake Winnipeg, the Saskatchewan was free from such interruption to Edmonton. The lower river was ascended under oars, unless a favorable wind lent its aid to navigation. As soon as high and dry banks and beaches were reached above The Pas, the crews went out on the line ahead, with little break, to Edmonton.

While the difficulties of navigation, except when exceptionally high water covered the "tracking grounds," decreased above Carlton, the danger from frequent war parties of Blackfeet increased until nearing Edmonton, where and at their own post of Rocky Mountain House only they were at peace with the company. Many an attempt to capture the boats was made and avoided by the boats shoving off shore just in time.

Another impediment, but of a nature to cause rejoicing, was the obstruction offered by innumerable buffalo crossing the river, sometimes for days, and affording feasts of fat things ample to satisfy the ravenous appetite of the voyageurs, and to gratify the craving of stomachs long accustomed to the dry provisions supplied as rations for the voyage.

THE AXE AND SNOWSHOE

The next course in his eduation as a Hudson's Bay man was in the handling of the axe, an implement few but carpenters and foresters are accustomed to in the Old

Country. After mastering this without chopping off any toes, he was sent out with carts of the fort hunters for the fall supply of buffalo meat, the staple food of more than a hundred mouths of all sizes in the fort for the winter.

Then came the snow, and dog driving and snowshoeing were the order of the day in trips to the Indian camps for furs and buffalo robes. While the snow is not deep snowshoes are not used, and men travel treading exactly in the footsteps of the one ahead. As the gait is generally a jog trot and the stride of the native longer than the European at first, and in-toed, too, it is not easy for a novice to gain the advantage of using the footprints ahead. The trot, too, continued for miles, is a gait one requires practise to attain in the perfection necessary to hold his own.

BLISTERS AND MAL DE RACQUETTE

Snow-shoeing is comparatively easy, but the tenderfoot is liable to blister, and there being no let-up, the blisters break and leave the raw bleeding parts to be frightfully irritated by the continued operation of the first cause. If this were not enough and to spare, le mal de racquette, snowshoe ache, attacks the muscles and tendons of limbs unaccustomed to or too long subject to the peculiar stresses and strains of wlaking on snowshoes, especially in deep snow and at a rapid rate. Under the circumstances of a voyage limited in time by the slender stock of food carried for man and dog, no stop for rest

or repair, except at night, is possible, and in spite of excruciating agony at each step the victim must march on or lay down and die. No traveller, however hardened, ever becomes exempt from the complaint, when circumstances favor its development.

SNOW BLINDNESS

Another of the hardships incident to travel in the snow is the dreadful blindness to which all are liable when the sun gets strong towards spring. Although provident men never start without tinted glass or wire eye-protectors at that time, they are liable to be lost, but more frequently lent to another already afflicted to save him from further suffering the effects of his improvidence or bravado. Misfortunes never come alone, and many a poor traveller has had to keep on moving while suffering the threefold agonies incident to such voyaging.

At last, sometimes, when human endurance could stand no more the victims might be compelled to halt, camp and endure the pangs of starvation at rest rather than the agonies of every motion. Possibly one of the party might be in better condition and of higher courage than his fellows; and he would set out for the nearest fort or camp to bring succor. In such a case Jack would have been the man after becoming an experienced traveller.

SPRING WORK

In the last days of the spring, cordwood cutting was the task set the company's laborers and voyageurs. A cord a day was a short, easy task for all but the greenest of

greenhands, and the rest of the day was free. Then the business of the year was completed by beating the dust from furs and buffalo robes and packing them into convenient packages for transport, all in the open square of the fort.

BOAT BRIGADE FOR YORK

The new business year--"new outfit" in fur trade parlance--was commenced on the departure of the Saskatchewan brigade of boats in early June for York factory. Besides the ten boats intended to bring back the supplies for the year, ten other new boats, built at Rocky Mountain House and Edmonton for other districts, started, all laden with buffalo provisions, pemmican, dried meat, cured tongues, tallow and marrowfat, as well as leather, shapanappi, rawhide cords, leather lodges and unprimed robes for use in the country. The twenty boats went down with the crews; ten boats and most of the buffalo products were left at Norway House for distribution, and the ten other boats with full crews went on to York Factory with the fur trade returns of the season.

Norris accompanied this annual boat brigade fifteen times to York Factory, first as middleman, then as bowman and finally as steersman in charge of a boat.

HUNTING AND TRADING ON PLAINS

When the boats returned the servants were employed at cutting hay with the scythe, curing it and hauling it to the fort farm. The grain and potato crops were then harvested, and plastering the dwellings with clay, outside

and in, for the winter occupied those about the fort, while others were sent off to their outposts and to make fall fisheries.

Besides the permanent outposts every fall parties were sent out, equipped to trade and hunt, to build wintering shanties at some point in the woods near where the buffalo and Indians were expected to be numerous during the winter. Nearly all the men sent in charge of these parties were natives, speaking the languages; but frequently they were accompanied by one of the European servants as assistants, upon whose steadiness and fidelity the company could rely. Norris was early engaged in such expeditions, and proved a capable man, acquiring soon a working knowledge of the Cree language, and displaying that business tact and judgment which he later used in the big business of Norris and Carey, the leading pioneer merchants of the early town of Edmonton.

In the later years of his service with the company, Norris used to be sent out to the buffalo plains in charge of such hunting and trading parties himself. On one of these occasions the Blackfeet made a foray on them, drove off their ponies and scared away his native companions, who escaped to Fort Pitt, leaving Jack alone. He stayed with the outfit and stood off the raiders for several days until relieved by a wandering war party of Crees.

In those days horse-trading was a great feature, and no one knew a horse better than Jack, or how to negotiate a trade. The Indians, especially when in liquor supplied by opposition traders, were often troublesome and threatening,

requiring both tact and courage in handling them. As he possessed both his services on these occasions were valuable to the company. Nevertheless they were not appreciated equivalently, and after fifteen years such service he quit their service and struck out for himself.

HE "GOES FREE"

By that time, 1863, the cream had been skimmed off the gold-bearing bars of the river near Edmonton, but the plains still abounded with buffalo, and hunting them was the main business and sport of the country. By this time Norris had taken to wife Marie Peltier, a Metis, and acquired a portion of the wealth and currency of the plains in the shape of a band of hunting and hauling ponies. By these means he secured ample provisions for sale and his own use, and in the intervals began to freight for the company.

A GREAT FREIGHTER

More and more he undertook freighting contracts, summer and winter, until one hundred of his carts were plying between Edmonton and Fort Garry every summer. The old trail, principally in order to avoid the raiding grounds of the Blackfeet on the south of the river, ran along the north side of the Saskatchewan, crossing at Carlton and the South branch about eighteen miles from that post.

As the end of the steel moved westwards, while the distance decreased the demand for transportation increased, through the new needs created by the different departments of the Dominion government and the change of the H.B.

freight route to the great north land from that by Portage la Loche to Athabasca Landing. These were the prosperous days of the freighting community of Edmonton district, before their occupation went when the railway came.

A GENERAL PIONEER MERCHANT

Early in his career as a freighter Norris started a general store in connection, which ultimately, under the firm of Norris and Carey, became a close rival to the Hudson's Bay establishment, and far surpassed the latter as a profitable business. While this business was managed by his clever and respected partner, the late E.F. Carey, and their popular manager, Tom Hourston, Mr. Norris delighting in outdoor life, devoted most of his time to his horse and cattle ranches.

Naturally in the course of the class of business done with the natives and old timers, much land was acquired by the firm and its individual members at the low prices when it was a drug on the market. Without estimating the value of such real property in 1899, when the firm retired from business, both members were known to be the wealthiest men in Edmonton. And after the rise in values which took place later their previous wealth must have quadrupled. The sailor lad of twenty who came to the Edmonton country sixty-seven years ago by industry and intelligence had made a competence before the freaks of fortune and real estate promoters added thereto values running into a fortune.

In the period of two-thirds of a century, during his residence Edmonton had passed through all the stages of a fortified fur-trading post, occasionally surrounded by towns of the moving tents of the Crees, from whose bastions were witnessed many a fight between them and the Blackfeet; next a Methodist mission and a few general stores and hotel outside the fort, and the terminus of the overland caravans freighting from Fort Garry; followed by the transient stage of steamboating on the Saskatchewan; and finally the railways which have confirmed its position as a central city, destined to still greater prosperity.

Throughout all these changes and as wealth that he did not know what to do with rolled in upon him, Norris remained the genial, kindly, charitable and unaffected man, in fact the neighborly old timer, with native good manners and never losing a musical trace of the Scottish accents of his youth. He leaves a big gap in the society of the real old timers wont to foregather at Henry Fraser's daily. The longest living link with Edmonton's past has been broken by his death.

Mr. Norris is survived by six children of his first wife, all living in Alberta: Mrs. Robert Logan, of Beaver Lake; Mrs. George Noyes, of Noyes' Crossing; George of Beaver Lake, and Adolphus, of the 138th battalion. A second large family and grandchildren also survive him. So the name Norris, so long linked with the past of the Edmonton country, will probably be perpetuated in the future population of Alberta, with, it is hoped, the many fine qualities of their progenitor.